

African Baptist Society Church
North side of York Street at corner of Pleasant Street
Nantucket
Nantucket County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-909

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MASS
10-NANT
32-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

AFRICAN BAPTIST SOCIETY CHURCH

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32-

Location: North side of York Street at corner of Pleasant Street, Nantucket, Massachusetts

Present Owner: Florence Higginbotham

Present Occupant: None

Present Use: Occasional storage or garage

Brief Statement of Significance: The only building remaining on Nantucket associated with the people from the west coast of Africa.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:

- 1826 -- Trustees of the African Baptist Society bought land for \$10.50 from Jeffery Summons.
- 1911 -- Henry C. Chase bought from Trustees of the African Baptist Society, for \$250. "a certain tract of land with the building thereon known as the African Baptist Church . . . situated in Newtown, on the corner of Pleasant and York Streets.
- 1933 to date -- Florence E. Higginbotham bought from Estate of Henry C. Chase for \$3,000. (Abstract: Records Registry of Deeds, Nantucket, Massachusetts.)

2. Date of erection: Some time after land was purchased in 1826, and probably before 1831. (Abstract: Churches and Pastors by Dudley, and 1834 map of Town drawn in 1831 by William Coffin Jr.)
3. Architect: None
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: This was a rectangular building with hip roof, double door entrance and Greek Revival motif. At one time there was a cupola on the building, the exact details of which are at present unknown.

In 1845, when the Masonic Lodge sold their building on Main Street, their chandelier was donated to the African Church Society. After a few years it was installed in ~~this~~ church and remained there until the building was sold in 1911, at which time the chandelier disappeared and was believed to have been destroyed.

5. Notes on alterations and additions:

Around 1920, during the Chase occupancy, large garage type doors were installed and the floor construction strengthened in order that trucks could be parked inside the building. Mr. Chase removed portions of the east side and extended the building on the north side.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

According to historians Myron S. Dudley and Alexander Starbuck, the York Street Colored Baptist Society was founded in 1831 and the African or Colored Baptist Church was established in a building on York Street that was used both for a colored school and for religious services. Death and other causes so depleted the Society after a few years ~~that it~~ ceased to exist.

In 1847 the Pleasant Street Baptist Society and Church was organized out of the York Street Church Society by and for colored people, and the location was at the corner of Pleasant and York Streets. The Church continued active from 1847 to 1888, after which there is no record of a minister, and services were held only on special occasions.

The use of different names for the Church Society is confusing. They may all refer to the same Society and Church. If the Society was not formed until 1831 as historians have stated, how could it buy land under the Society's name in 1826 as is proven by the town records?

The Reverend James E. Crawford, the colored pastor, held the pastorate at the Pleasant Street or African Baptist Church for forty-one years from 1847 to 1888, the year he died. He was so light complexioned so easily to pass as a white man and was one of those genial but sincere and upright men who commanded respect and esteem. The receipts from his parishioners were meager for his parish was small and its members poor, and Mr. Crawford supported himself by following the occupation of a barber. Farnham in his Brief Historical Data states, "Under Brother Crawford's ministerial leading and by his messages presented, his Baptist chapel on York Street provided indeed a bethel to many seeking Christian consolation and ethical uplift. He not infrequently preached also for the white people in the Summer Street Baptist Church."

Another Church, the African Methodist Episcopal, known as the Zion Church, was located in 1835 on West York Street. A dwelling now stands on the site and little is known of the Church activities.

The section west of Orange Street and south of Silver Street was known as "Guinea" as it was at that time a localized community of colored residents, with shops and stores of their own in the neighborhood. Guinea was a small section of that part of Nantucket known as Newtown.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: View of building about 1880 in collection of Nantucket Historical Association; indicated on 1834 map of Nantucket by William Coffin, Jr.
2. Bibliography:

Dudley, Myron Samuel. Churches and Pastors of Nantucket, Mass. from First Settlement to the Present Time, 1659 - 1902. Boston: D. Clapp and Son, 1902.

Farnham, Joseph Ellis Coffee. Brief historical data and memories of my boyhood days in Nantucket, Providence: Snow and Farnham Co., 1915

Codfrey, Edward K. The Island of Nantucket, What It Was and What It Is, Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1882.

Starbuck, Alexander. The History of Nantucket, County, Island and Town, Boston: C. E. Goodspeed and Co., 1924.

Prepared by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin
Nantucket, Massachusetts
August, 1967

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This is a very simple wood frame structure, shingle exterior, important only as to its initial function.
2. Condition of fabric: Poor, extensively reworked and in disrepair.

B. Description of the Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 25' - 7" by 35' - 5".
2. Foundations: Rough fieldstone piers, no mortar.
3. Wall construction: Wood frame, weathered wood shingles, plain corner boards and fascia.
4. Structural system: Post and lintel.
5. Steps: Wood open string steps.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Horizontal sliding garage doors of vertical boards (modern); modern panel door and

trim at northeast corner.

- b. Windows: Single hung, twelve-over-twelve sash, some boarded shut.
- 7. Roof: Hip roof, composition covering, ridge boards, boxed eaves, no cornice, remains of metal gutter and downspout at south elevation only.
- C. Description of the Interior: Single interior space inaccessible at time of survey.
- D. Site: The African Baptist Church faces south on York Street with Pleasant Street to the west; wood picket fence at Pleasant and York Streets, small yards at east, south and west sides of building; lean-to shed near northeast corner.

Prepared by F. Blair Reeves, A.I.A.
Nantucket, Massachusetts
August, 1971

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of the 1967 Historic American Buildings Survey summer project on Nantucket, Massachusetts. This is the second project of a continuing HABS comprehensive survey of the early architecture and urban design of Nantucket financed by a grant from the Nantucket Historical Trust.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Project Director was Eugene George, A.I.A. Historical information was provided by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin of Nantucket, Massachusetts. Architectural description prepared by Professor F. Blair Reeves, A.I.A., (University of Florida). Photographs are by Jack E. Boucher of Linwood, New Jersey. The material was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Mrs. Constance Werner Ramirez.